



## Frequently Asked Questions: Is It Possible to be a Christian Without Being a Hypocrite?

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Sometimes it is easy to play a game as Christians called - Let's Pretend. "Let's pretend that we never have struggles with our faith. Let's pretend that there aren't things about being a Christian that we don't really feel that comfortable with. Let's pretend that we have all the answers to those nagging questions that are in the back of our mind or those questions that those without faith ask us." The fact is we all have questions concerning our faith and far too often we shove them aside and hope they will go away. Sometimes they do go away and answers come to us but sometimes they pile one on top of another and given time, they begin to undermine our faith. Because of that, I want to periodically stop and do mini-series for 3 or 4 weeks where we can wrestle with some Frequently Asked Questions. So this week, I want us to wrestle with a simple question; is it possible to be a Christian without being a hypocrite?

This past week I spent a lot of time on the Internet reading the blogs of people who have spent an amazing amount of time trashing Christianity. I read things like "I choose not to believe in the incredible hotchpotch of superstition which is Christianity (which is all the more understandable if you come from Northern Ireland, a place where religion has been the excuse for appalling barbarity)." Another wrote "Hey, I would never be a Christian. I mean look at all the hypocrites in the Church". Mark Twain wrote "If Christ were here, there would be one thing He would not be - a Christian". Listen to what one Christian wrote: "I don't go to church anymore. I love the Lord, read His Word, pay my tithes, fellowship with a select few Christians but can't trust a lot of Church going people, even though I love them. Too much hypocrisy! It seems that a lot of unsaved people can be trusted more. This should not be".

I read these and I want to weep because they are talking about my Jesus' Church and His followers. But to be honest, I am sure that like me, there have been times when you have been hurt and embarrassed by the actions of other Christians. When I read what some of the fallen Christian superstars have done and what some other Christians say, I want to hang my head in shame. There have been times when I have actually apologized to people for the actions of other Christians. And I also need to admit that there have been times when I have been disappointed with some of my own actions as a Christian. Now I think it is fair to say like the old evangelist once said 'where there is light there will be bugs'. In other words, where God is at work and Christians are making a difference in our world, there will also be those who hang around the edges whose commitment is shallow and whose actions are questionable. But we shouldn't be surprised that the Church struggles with the issue of hypocrisy. One of the things the Old Testament prophets spoke often against was hypocrisy. Jesus himself often spoke against hypocrisy. Read Matthew 23 and you will find Jesus railing again on the Religious of His day for looking so pious, spouting rules, judging others and seeing themselves as better than everyone else. For that, He called them snakes and white washed outhouses. Paul picked up the same cry when he said 'They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him'. (Titus 1:16)

A Hypocrite is a 'play actor'. In other words, they don't practice what they preach. The word comes from the Greek concept of an actor who can play different roles on the same stage which are not true to who the person really is. That means that what they say and do does not correspond with who they are. It is people who claim to

be Christians and yet by their business practices, words they say or the things they do, live contrary to what Jesus says and often who they themselves claim to be.

**I. Is the statement True or False?  
Is it possible to be a Christian and not be a hypocrite?**

The quick and cheeky answer is “Come and join us, there is always room for one more hypocrite in the group”. I say that real hypocrites have existed, do exist and will continue to exist in the church. But understand that hypocrites are even more annoying to God than they will ever be to you and I. But the real answer to the question is Yes and No.

Yes. Without reservation I can say that it is possible to be a Christian without being a hypocrite. There are many men and women of integrity in the Church (in this church) who boldly cry out against hypocrisy with their words and with their actions. They are the kind of person who will make a deal worth millions that rests on their handshake. They are the people whose children see faith lived out in their lives, whose co-workers know they are a Christian by their honesty, fairness, hard work and care for other. They are those whose friends and neighbours realize that they not only keep their word but care about others deeply. They are the kind of people whose faith directs not only what they believe but who they are. I am thankful that I am only responsible for one church and that so many of you live out what you believe with excellence and with a deep passion to live out your faith in your daily life.

No. It is impossible to live a Christian life where we perfectly live up to all the standards the bible teaches. I say that because I know my heart. While I love Jesus, I am often reminded of what Paul said in Romans 3:23 “For all have sinned and fallen (and keep falling) short of the glory of God” and Romans 7:15, 24 “For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. What a wretched man I am, who will rescue me from this body of death”. We all know our hearts and know that we can play the hypocrite at times as well. But let me make 3 comments regarding the fact that we all have to struggle with being Hypocrites to some extent.

1. Since when does the existence of hypocrisy determine what a person will participate in and be affiliated with? We know there are Dr.'s, Lawyers, grocers, educators, pastors, and service clubs and even countries which have people within them who are hypocrites, and yet we haven't stopped going to the Dr or stopped shopping at grocery stores or handing in our Canadian citizenship. The fact is people are people. That is not an excuse, it is a fact. And as long as there are people in the church we will need the forgiveness and ongoing transforming presence of Jesus to keep changing us a piece at a time.

2. No one is perfect, but Jesus. Jesus is the only one who lived a perfect life and the last time I looked I wasn't Jesus. That is not an excuse it is a reality. I still have a natural inclination at times to choose selfish over selflessness, to choose anger over self control and of choosing sin over what is right. That is why I chose to be a Christian and joined a church. It is because I know that I need help trying to follow Jesus. I know I will mess up even more without the help of other Christians. That is why Hebrews 10:25 says “Let us not give up meeting on a regular basis together as Christians”.

3. The most wonderful thing about Christianity is people don't have to have it all together to be welcomed into faith and into Jesus' church. The church is a place where

we need to be able to admit that we don't have it all together, that we need Jesus' ongoing forgiveness and the help from others who are stumbling heavenward to help us on our journey of faith. The problem is that when appearances, putting on masks or playing pretend (which is the definition of hypocrisy) begins to infiltrate the church and we are afraid to say 'last week I did it again, last week I was on the internet on sights where I shouldn't have been' or 'I fell sexually' or 'those old insecurity grabbed me by the throat again and I acted in such a terrible way'. When that happens and we put on masks and play 'I pretend nothing is wrong in my life' then we fail to hear someone else say "I know what you are talking about, I have been there. Can we stumble heavenward together?" And we stop being the church, which by definition needs to be a place where people who admit they don't have it all together come together to help each other be more like Jesus. Hypocrisy stops the church from being the church.

Cliff Knechtle in his book 'Give me an Answer' says "We all either try to hide our bad sides or we try to make them look good. But deep inside we all know that we fall short of living the way we know we should. No one can escape the charge of hypocrite. No one but Jesus himself. He is the only one who lived up to God's standards. By living within the security of Christ's love we are free to peel off masks and to become honest people before God". So the good news, as we run to Jesus, is not only can we take off our masks and live more real lives, but the church increasingly becomes a place where people who don't have it all together have a place and people who can help them become 'new people in Jesus'.

## **II. A Definite Yes!**

My devotions took me to I John this past week and I came across this verse: I John 1:6 "If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth". Jesus said that in the end time, people will come up to Jesus and say "Jesus I went to church, I did some good things, I even spoke publically about you - see I must be a Christian". And Jesus will say 'I never knew you'. I mention this because by definition a hypocrite can be someone who is playing a part (fully engaged in the play) and yet they are only acting out the part. It isn't real to them. In other words if we find hypocrisy in our lives, we need to ask if we really are a Christians or just caught up in playing a part (maybe we have been so convincing we have convinced ourselves that we are a Christian when we have never become one yet). In 1 John it lists 10 things that should tell you if you are a Christian or not. So as I read them, check them off.

1. (1:7) If you are a Christian you should like hanging around other Christians.
2. (1:8) Do you find yourself wanting to fudge what Jesus calls sin and explain them away? If that is happening, something is going wrong with your conscience.
3. (2:3) Do you know the 10 commandments? Do you strive to try to keep them?
4. (2:15) Loving all the world offers you doesn't mean we live in a tent. It is just asking if getting the stuff of the world is more important than faith and then caring for the needs of others. It means that if getting that next car, house or stuff is so all encompassing that caring for the poor (or the 25,000 people who are just like your kids & family who die every day of starvation) simply falls off your radar, then you have to question if God's heart is for the poor. If Jesus' strongest word against hypocrisy was for those who neglect the poor and yet we ignore the poor and chase stuff, then we need to ask if Jesus has really been given a place in our heart.

5. (2:23) At work or at school, do you pretend you aren't a Christian?
6. (3:2) We can't wait to see God and can't wait until Jesus touches down.
7. (3:8) If you keep on sinning and don't want to change - something is wrong.
8. (3:14) You not only like hanging around Christians, but love them.
9. (4:6) Love hearing the word being preached and taught because you love to know more about Jesus your heavenly father.
10. (4:15) When was the last time you told someone else about Jesus?

I went through this list of things because John is saying that if you do not see these things in your life, it may mean one of two things. One is that you may need a heart change. You can stop playing at being a Christian and start fully letting Jesus change your heart and renew your soul. Or, if we are seeing an erosion of some of these things in our heart, know that God is calling us back to live a deeper life. As we do, we walk from hypocrisy into Christlikeness.

### **III. Lessons to Live By**

In a world that is looking for hypocrites, how then shall we live? Let me give you four ideas to think about.

1. Understand, people are watching. When I worked at the Strip Mine as a blaster, I lived in a setting where swearing was not only a continuous activity, it was almost an art form. And while I was afraid someday I would swear during a sermon, I was determined to try and not swear (at least 'out loud' at work). In my 3rd year at the mine someone used one of those words that has a double meaning, one meaning of course being vulgar. And that afternoon around 2:30 without thinking I used the word. It surprised me and the guys kidded me about it but it seemed to be soon forgotten (I thought). That night around 5:00 I went to the bank (2 1/2 hours later, 27 miles away) and as I walked up to the counter, the bank teller said "so I heard you swore at work today". It was then that I realized that not only had my crew mates been watching me, but the whole town had been watching me. And while that isn't fair, it is still a reality for us who name the name of Jesus. Why are they watching? Why is hypocrisy such a big deal? It is because they are desperately wanting us to fail as a Christian so they have an excuse not to follow Jesus. And they are desperately wanting us not to fail so they will know that Jesus and His claims are great enough to touch their lives. We need to understand that hypocrisy comes at a high cost to ourselves, to others and to our God. We need to live in such a way that others will see Jesus and want to have Him in their lives.

2. We need to Understand what we are offering. Ruth Graham (Billy Graham's wife) said that when she was in India a man named Pashi told her 'I would like to believe in Christ. We of India would like to believe in Christ, but we have never seen a Christian who was like Christ'. Not knowing how to answer the man she sought Dr. Akbar Haqq's counsel. Haqq decisively answered "That is quite simple. I would tell Pashi 'I am not offering you Christians. I am offering you Christ'". Thank God that while we are called by Jesus to live our lives in keeping with His commands, it is still all about what Jesus has done, not just what we have done.

3. Live Humbly. Remember that when it comes to what we believe, at times we may believe things that are counter cultural. Those beliefs are to govern how we live not be a club with which we beat others up. I remember sitting in a room with a couple

who wanted to be married and I knew that they had been living together for a while. I found myself telling them why I thought it was wrong for them to live together. After they left I realized that they knew what I believed. I think they even felt bad about it and yet I had used what I believed to beat them up a bit. Instead I could have celebrated that they wanted to do things right and that day I was determined that that would be my approach in similar situations. As evangelical Christians we seem to love to tell others where they are sinning instead of telling them that while we disagree with some things they may be doing or have done, we welcome them to join with us who do not have it all together, as we attempt to follow Jesus. That doesn't mean we compromise truth but it means we live humbly in a loving way.

4. Strive to live Right . Bill Hybels loves sail boat racing. One day in the middle of a race when something went wrong he heard himself swear out loud. As he looked up sheepishly he saw a few of his crew mates (some Christians, some not) laughing at him. He said he stopped and acknowledged that he had messed up and apologized 'I hadn't lived up their ideals'. Like Jimmy Baker after he got out of prison, he wrote a book entitled I was wrong and I think his life is proof that he has changed. We know that because we are just people we will mess up at times but with God's help we need to determine to live in such a way that people will see that we have been with Jesus.

I love reading biographies as they let me read about people who have lived their lives well. One of my hero's is David Livingstone the great explorer and missionary. David Livingstone heard Robert Moffatt say "On a clear morning in Africa the smoke from 1000 villages can be seen where the name of Jesus Christ has never been heard". And so David Livingstone poured his life into the people and continent of Africa. He preached Christ, treated the sick, gave his life for them and then disappeared for 6 years. A newspaper in England sent a man name Henry Stanley to find him. Stanley spent months searching for Livingstone and when he found him he said those famous words 'Dr. Livingstone I presume'. Now let me tell you the rest of the story. Stanley was an adventurer for hire who by his own admission was a wicked man. He writes the following 'For 4 months and 4 days I lived with him in the same hut, or the same boat, or the same tent and I NEVER FOUND A FAULT IN HIM. I went to Africa prejudiced against religion as the worst infidel in London. But little by little seeing his piety, his gentleness, his zeal, his earnestness, and how he went quietly about his business, I was converted by him, although he had not tried to do it'. Six years later David Livingstone died and was found kneeling by his cot. His heart was buried in Africa and his body carried by African friends across Africa and buried in Westminster Abbey. After his burial a man left from England to take David Livingstone's place to preach the gospel of Jesus. Do you know who it was? It was Henry Stanley - the man who had seen a life lived well devoid of hypocrisy who was attempting to live our Jesus' words in his daily life. May our lives be such that others do not call us hypocrites but instead see Jesus lived out in us.

For your added study – this one's free.

copied from Why Are So Many Christians Hypocrites? by Rich Deem

1. hypocrisy. (n.d.). The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition. Retrieved September 25, 2007, from Dictionary.com website.
2. Cain and Abel (his younger brother) brought offerings to God. However, God did not have regard for Cain's offering, since it was inferior in some way: "If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it." (Genesis 4:7) So, Cain was being a hypocrite by pretending to love God by bringing an offering to Him. However, Cain was probably just trying to keep up with his brother, whom he murdered after God called him on his hypocrisy.
3. "So when you give to the poor, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full." (Matthew 6:2)
4. "When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full." (Matthew 6:5)  
"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you devour widows' houses, and for a pretense you make long prayers; therefore you will receive greater condemnation." (Matthew 23:14)
5. "Whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance so that they will be noticed by men when they are fasting. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full." (Matthew 6:16)
6. "You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye." (Matthew 7:5)  
"Or how can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me take out the speck that is in your eye,' when you yourself do not see the log that is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take out the speck that is in your brother's eye. (Luke 6:42)
7. "You hypocrites, rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you: 'THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME. 'BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN.'" (Matthew 15:7-9)  
And He said to them, "Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: 'THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME. (Mark 7:6)
8. But Jesus perceived their malice, and said, "Why are you testing Me, you hypocrites?" (Matthew 22:18)  
"Shall we pay or shall we not pay?" But He, knowing their hypocrisy, said to them, "Why are you testing Me? Bring Me a denarius to look at." (Mark 12:15)
9. "But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut off the kingdom of heaven from people; for you do not enter in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in." (Matthew 23:13)
10. "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you devour widows' houses, and for a pretense you make long prayers; therefore you will receive greater condemnation." (Matthew 23:14)

11. "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel around on sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves." (Matthew 23:15)

12. "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others." (Matthew 23:23)

13. "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence." (Matthew 23:25)

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness." (Matthew 23:27)

"So you, too, outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness." (Matthew 23:28)

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous... Therefore, behold, I am sending you prophets and wise men and scribes; some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city" (Matthew 23:29, 34)

14. But the Lord answered him and said, "You hypocrites, does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the stall and lead him away to water him? (Luke 13:15)

15. "You hypocrites! You know how to analyze the appearance of the earth and the sky, but why do you not analyze this present time? And why do you not even on your own initiative judge what is right?" (Luke 12:56-57)

16. and will cut him in pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Matthew 24:51)

"The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Matthew 13:41-42)

17. Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good. (Romans 12:9)

18. by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, (1 Timothy 4:2)

Therefore, putting aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, (1 Peter 2:1)

19. The rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy. But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in the presence of all, "If you, being a Jew, live like the Gentiles and not like the Jews, how is it that you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews? (Galatians 2:13-14)

20. Therefore, putting aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, (1 Peter 2:1)

21. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist,

there is disorder and every evil thing. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. (James 3:14-17)

22. "Now when they fall they will be granted a little help, and many will join with them in hypocrisy. Some of those who have insight will fall, in order to refine, purge and make them pure until the end time; because it is still to come at the appointed time." (Daniel 11:34-35)

23. This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother. (1 John 3:10)

24. "Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name. At that time many will fall away and will betray one another and hate one another. Many false prophets will arise and will mislead many. Because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end, he will be saved. This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come." (Matthew 24:9-14)

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